

# Through Farmers' Eyes



Jedida Monyani cultivates tea on her *shamba* in Maragoli, Kenya. For the 15 kilos that she picks each week, she receives just under CAN\$2.

2001-11-09

*Jennifer Pepall*

The pregnant farmer stands with her bare feet firmly planted in the soil, swinging her hoe under the heat of the noon sun. Although the sweet potatoes she is digging have been in the ground for three months, most are no bigger than the width of her middle finger.

The woman's *shamba* is one of thousands of farms that form a patchwork of intensively cultivated small holdings in Maragoli in Western Kenya. As her meager potato harvest shows, the once fertile soil is at its limits. Such a decline in soil fertility is commonly blamed on population pressures and scarcity of land. But in *Gender, Land, and Livelihoods in East Africa: Through Farmers' Eyes*, Ritu Verma shows that soil degradation is embedded in gender relations and complex political and economic struggles at the local level. Her work, based on a case study conducted among Maragoli women and farmers, is a milestone in an area of gender studies that has received little research attention.

---

## Interview

- "Case study after case study has shown that in sub-Saharan Africa, 80 percent of agriculture is undertaken by women...women are the farmers. But the literature has been so biased in the past, silencing women's stories."

### **Slide Show**

- As part of her research, Ritu Verma gave disposable cameras to several Maragoli women to document their lives. Their photos are featured in *Gender, Land, and Livelihoods in East Africa* as well as in the online slide show, [Through Farmers' Eyes](#). Ms Verma's discusses the [use of photography](#) as a research method in her book.
- 

### **Audio File**

- [Listen to members](#) of the Viyalo Village Choir Women's Group, which hires itself out to earn money. "We uplift people's souls in that, when they are feeling low, they get encouraged."
- 

### **Contact the Researcher**

- [Write to Ritu Verma](#): Please send your comments and questions to the author. A selection of emails will be posted on the site.
- 

### **The Book**

- [\*Gender, Land, and Livelihoods in East Africa\*](#)